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PRAYER

A Study in the Metaphysical
and Existential Character of Prayer

A THESIS

presented to the
FACULTY OF THE
EPISCOPAL THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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April 1965

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter	
I. AN EPISTOMOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PRAYER	11
II. THE 'NEW THEOLOGY' APPROACH TO PRAYER	27
III. THE UNCONDITIONAL ETHIC OF PRAYER	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is going to deal with the question: How does one bring together the God experienced in prayer (traditionally thought of as the activity of the sacred), and the God experienced in daily existence (traditionally thought of as the activity of the profane or secular)? In other words: Is the experience of the infinite (God) in prayer compatible with man's experience of his own finite existence? It must be stated at the outset of this paper that one of the basic assumptions being made is that this question is a religious question of God (i.e., that it has its roots in metaphysics), and that it has an existential structure. In the words which John Macquarrie uses to explain what he means by a phenomenological exploration of a question, almost identical to the one stated above:

It is not a theoretical or speculative question, raised by the intellect alone, but a practical question posed by the whole being of man who has to exist in

the world and decide about his existence.¹

In considering our question in this way, we will see that the division between the finite and the infinite is just one of the separations man must face. Man lives, moves and has his Being in a bifurcated universe. Where there is an East there is always a West, a North always a South; where there is a Black man there is always the contrast of a White man to give the Black man his identity; where there is good there must always be bad - so that one may define good as good; where there is a subject there is a predicate, and where there is an effect there you will find a cause. There is no limit to this bifurcation. Physiologically, psychologically, theologically, and logically man finds himself faced with the demands of a dual existence.

The desire to be free from this conflict of a dual existence can be seen in man's universal yearning after perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," is Christ's imperative for all men. Since the 'Father in heaven' represents the pole of the

¹ J. Macquarrie, "How is theology Possible," in The Honest to God Debate, ed. D. L. Edwards (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 187.

infinite (and perfection), there is a tendency to equate perfection with that which is not finite and therefore free from bifurcation. Consequently, men have looked to religion and in particular to prayer as a vertical escape from the horizontal finitude of the historical self. However, in attempting such an escape, 20th century man has found that the demands of his finitude, or what we might call his impulse toward community, grows proportionally more acute with every apparent vertical advance. Reinhold Niebuhr writes that:

The consistent religious impulse, which is to say the mystical impulse, has, in short, sought individual wholeness beyond the conditions of historical existence. The desire for perfection is individualistic and not social.²

We can see that a vertical response to the desire to be perfect leads one away from his very goal to achieve that perfection, since it puts him into conflict with his unavoidable existence as a finite self. Failing in his attempt to gain perfection through prayer (vertical response to God) man turns to the opposite pole, the pole of his finite existence

² Reinhold Niebuhr, Pious and Secular America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 114.

(horizontal response to God), in order to seek the same end. In doing so he seeks answers to overcome the conflicts in both his behavioral pattern and that of others, by constructing a system of rational truths based on empirically varifiable evidence. Germain to such an approach is the epistemological question: What is knowledge, and how do I know? Man knows that there is more to existence than existence itself. (Even the pure existentialist will admit to this, although he will not admit to this being true outside of his own experience of his existence.) The logic of man's reason tells him that for every object 'known' there must be a 'knower'; i.e. I exist as a knowing person, and it is the ability to know which distinguishes myself from my existence. To define my existence is to define me as a 'knowing' person, and therefore is not a definition of my existence at all. Existence is, and can not be defined; the essence of my existence, that is my ability to know something, is what I am - my existence.

Again man finds himself frustrated in his attempt to overcome his bifurcated existence by seeking answers through epistemological inquiries on an existential plane. The problem here, as was the problem on the metaphysical plane between the finite and the infinite, is the unexplainable

gap between the 'knower' and the 'known.' That is, there is the problem of the knower knowing the 'essence' or nature of the object experienced. Further, it would appear that the failure to bridge the gap between these various sets of opposites is inherent in the very theory of knowledge employed. Simply stated, any epistemological situation is eventually forced into defining its terms according to the opposites it is attempting to bring together. If I attempt to bring together the 'knower' and the 'known,' the subject and the object, I must relinquish my right to define these terms, and this I find I cannot do. Without a subject I can not have an object, or without an object I can not have a subject, and therefore the only conclusion seems to be that I must give up my pursuit after knowledge of the good or ethical life and remain trapped in my imperfection.

The avoidance of this imprisonment by those who seek freedom by means of either pole usually takes the form of a 'transcendental idea' within a metaphysical construct. The best illustration of this transcendental element within a metaphysical system can be found in Immanuel Kant's answer to the question: How is metaphysics possible as a science? His explanation is, that for metaphysics to be possible as a

natural disposition it must be based 'in concreto' on the 'Critique,' i.e., the theory of 'transcendental idealism,' making use of synthetic a priori judgements and not speculative reason, (the Psychological, Cosmological and Theological Idea).³ "Metaphysics must be a science, not only

³ Immanuel Kant, Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1951), p. 96 & p. 110. Because metaphysics deals with both the ideas of nature which find their application in experience and the pure rational concepts (which can never be given through experience), Kant is presented with the problem of establishing a means of transcending this conflict if he is to show how metaphysics is possible. The three transcendental Ideas which his predecessors had used in order to establish a pure reason and by which they hoped to uncover the 'hidden ends of the natural destiny of our reason' (which Kant found to be in his categories) were taken up by Kant and shown to be based on an unavoidable illusion. The Psychological Ideas, B. The Cosmological Ideas, and C. The Theological Ideas.

For the purpose of this paper only C above will be treated here. A discussion of A and B can be found in Kant's book Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics, paragraphs 40 to 54.

C. The Theological Idea - The break between science and religion finds its conclusion in this final Idea. The pure reason here applied is independent of experience, and therefore transcends it; thus, one determines the possibility and the actuality of a 'perfect primal Being' by means of the Idea. This ontological argument, which was formulated by Descartes, is again rejected on the grounds that it is a dialectical illusion arising "...from our making the subjective conditions of our thinking objective conditions of objects themselves, and from making an hypothesis necessary for the satisfaction of our reason into a dogma." (p. 96)

He concludes by restating his original proposition, which is the resume of the whole Critique: "Reason by all its a priori principles never teaches anything more than objects of possible experience, and even of these nothing more than can be known in experience." (p. 110)

as a whole, but in all its parts; otherwise it is nothing at all; because, as speculation of pure reason, it finds a hold only on common convictions.⁴ Furthermore he makes room for a problematical assumption (hypothesis) which shows man's sense of obligation (moral obligation) to be a valid consciousness within the realm of practical knowledge. He calls this hypothesis the "categorical imperative." It is a universal command that ultimately had no conditions and gave man the 'ought' to an existence that would otherwise have become mechanical under determined laws. The idea of the transcendent nature of the categorical imperative is a necessary idea, necessary for the living of the good life.

In this thesis I will attempt to show that prayer is necessary for the living of a good life. It is necessary because it overcomes the problem of man's separation from his God and his surroundings. This is accomplished first by the God of the transcendental idea, within a metaphysical construct,⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵ We will assume that they are one and the same since, as Kant has pointed out, the idea of God as transcendent is not arrived at by speculative reason based on experience. Rather, it is based on a synthetic a priori judgement, that is, that the knowledge of God as transcendent is merely expansive; increasing the given knowledge, not dependent on a principle of analysis or

and secondly by the fact that the idea of God as transcendent is held by us in our existential situation. In describing prayer in these terms Heiler writes:

The miracle of prayer does not lie in the accomplishment of the prayer, in the influence of man on God, but in the mysterious contact which comes to pass between the finite and the infinite Spirit. It is by this very fact that prayer is a genuine fellowship of man with God, that it is something not merely psychological, but transcendental and metaphysical.⁶

The miracle Heiler is speaking of is really not so much a miracle as it is a transcendent idea of what God is doing in prayer. The nearest word that we could substitute for this 'miracle' is 'faith.' However, faith set within a metaphysical construct, such as the one we have seen Kant present, becomes a knowable miracle by its synthetic a priori properties. It is at once part of our experience while at

the law of contradiction alone and known a posteriori.

In this way it is possible to construct an idea of transcendence within a metaphysical system on synthetical propositions a priori. In Kant's own words, "...The generation of a priori knowledge by intuition as well as by concepts, in fine, of synthetical propositions a priori, especially in philosophical knowledge, constitutes the essential subject of metaphysics." (I. Kant, Puloegemena to Any Future Metaphysics, p. 19.

⁶ Friedrich Heiler, Prayer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.), p. 357.

the same time outside of our experience. It is faith defined not according to its existence (for existence is not definable), but defined in its essence. This essence is God's transcendency. Herein I believe we will find the answer to our problem of separation. Our experiences of God, both natural and supernatural, become one in our idea of His transcendence. In its paradoxical setting: to pray is to know the unknowable.

The following three chapters will be an attempt at making this theory more understandable. The first chapter will be concerned with prayer in a metaphysical context, and the problems which arise in attempting to make this a vehicle or vertical response toward perfection. The second chapter will be concerned with the 'New Theology,' - as it is understood to have come out of the Cambridge Circuit, - and the problems that arise in failing to recognize, as a basis for their 'New Morality,' the need for a metaphysical approach to prayer. And the final chapter will be an attempt at a synthesis of both the vertical and horizontal approach to prayer, as discussed in the first two chapters, by constructing an 'unconditional' ethic of prayer.

It is hoped therefore, that we will come to realize that:

Without prayer faith remains a theoretical conviction; worship is only an external and formal act; moral action is without spiritual depth; man remains at a distance from God.⁷

⁷Ibid., p. 362.

CHAPTER I
AN EPISTOMOLOGICAL APPROACH TO PRAYER

It has been said that "Dogmatics" attempts to answer the question: What do I think? Now, if you are of the school that believes that doctrine (dogmatics) precedes experience, then you will agree with those who hold that it is the task of Moral Theological Ethics to answer the question: What do I do about what I think? (If you are not of the mind which holds that doctrine precedes experience, then the question for Moral Theological Ethics would have to be rephrased a bit, to read: What do I do about establishing what I think?) Finally, it might be said that it is the job of Ascetical Theology to deal with the question: How shall I do what I need to do about what I believe?

Although some may disagree (i.e. those who would make the following claim for Moral Theological Ethics), it is with Ascetical Theology that we get down to the practical level of our religious enterprise. Martin Thornton, considering the practical nature of Ascetical Theology writes that:

...ascetical theology is primarily a practical approach to all other branches of theology, a catalyst or synthesizing

agent which welds all the departments into a creative whole.⁸

Ascetical Theology therefore, is a very practical wrestling with the very real problem which Paul poses for us as he wrestles with the power of his fleshly nature.

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (Rm. 7:18,19.)

Ascetical Theology must deal with the practical problem of how one finds power to do that which he would do. If this be true, the logical question which would follow is: What is it that I must do? Unfortunately the scope of this thesis does not cover the area which would answer this question. That is the task of those who define dogma.

...by dogma, 'the priest must know,' by ascetic he 'can impart;' and dancing and prayer can be 'learned,' (I would prefer "developed or acquired") without anatomy or dogma - that is without teaching but by direction. Now this direction ('teaching of art') implies in Prayer the science of ascetic- 'technique, in fact'- which is the living experience of the Church; in other words, tradition is its living and essential present sense. This preliminary point explains my attitude to the bulk of Christian ascetical theology...it...dare not, base itself on

⁸ Martin Thornton, English Spirituality (London: S.P.C.K., 1963), p. 16.

anything but traditional achievement or orthodoxy. But if anything really lives then it must develop change and be reinterpreted.⁹

Simply stated, ascetical theology may be defined as applied dogmatics. The goal sought in this application is a balanced life of spontaneity and discipline toward the achievement of the Vision of God. The discipline is necessary as a context out of which spontaneity can be expressed.

We can say, [writes Thornton] with St. John of the Cross, that ascetical theology consists in those methods and disciplines which dispose the soul to receive the notions of the Holy Ghost: ¹⁰ it is the art of cooperating with grace.

The practice which ranks first among the disciplines disposed to help the soul 'receive the notions of the Holy Ghost' is prayer. Before we go on to see how God is known in prayer, it might be helpful to look briefly at a possible definition of prayer and a few of the principles of this discipline. According to Heiler, prayer satisfies a psychical need. That is to say, that prayer satisfies a longing of the

⁹ Martin Thornton, Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation. (London: S.P.C.K., 1961), p. 132. (single quotes from Fr. Patrick Thompson's book entitled Priesthood, p. 267, published by H. S. Box.)

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

finite to be with the infinite. From a purely psychological perspective it might be said that "prayer is the expression of a primitive impulsion to a higher, richer, intenser life."¹¹ Just as the body desires health because it is a better state of being than illness, so the finite nature of Man desires the infinite nature of God, because it is a fuller state of being than is finiteness. Although a well-defined explanation of the ontological nature of this longing on the part of man would be difficult to state in brief form, it should be noted that, whatever the origin (for the Christian, God originates this desire; i.e., God is prevenient in all things, including prayer) the desire has its roots in volition. It is not just natural that I should desire better health or happiness, rather I willfully seek after these things. This is a willful act because I have through observation concluded that these states of being are desirable. The same observation has been made by my faculties which have led me to desire the infinite, i.e. I have experienced the finite and infinite and am therefore able to will that which I conclude to be more desirable, which in this case is the infinite. My desire

¹¹Heiler, Prayer, p. 355.

then to be in Union with God, which is the aim of prayer, is an act of will - my will. It is necessary that this point be made quite clear, since it is the basis for looking at prayer as a discipline. If prayer were not willed and disciplined it would be something done according to one's moods. Prayer would be an act of 'feeling' and not volitional, were this not so.

Finally prayer must be thought of as growth or progress. One does not pray and all of a sudden find himself in union with God. One grows into this union just as one grows into physical adulthood. We can see then how necessary it is to remember that prayer is volitional and not subject to feeling, for to mature, physically, mentally and spiritually is to willfully aspire to these ends. If it were all up to feeling there would be little progress, since most would be inclined to feel like remaining in the protective environment of their youth - in a state of innocence. Irresponsible activity is certainly due to allowing one's motives to be governed by feeling. I may not feel like eating breakfast, but I should be willfully disposed to eat breakfast if I desire to maintain my health and possibly my disposition throughout the morning.

To guard against 'feeling' in our activity of eating

meals most find it convenient to schedule certain times for such purposes. In prayer we find that the same precautionary measures must be taken. The form this takes is what we have called discipline or rule. Rule is, "neither artificial nor a burden, but the principle of civilized life,"¹² writes Thornton. An example of what he means by this can be seen in a summary of his 'Christian framework,' i.e., Office/Mass/ Private Prayer.¹³ "The rule of the Anglican Church can be summarized" he writes, "as consisting of:

- 1) The Office, which is the corporate worship of the Body of Christ to the Father... (The psychological attitude implied by the recitation of the Office is self-sacrificing, objective offering to God the transcendene Father).
- 2) The Mass is the loving embrace of Christ in joy, attained by the synthesis of his complete succour offered and his absolute demand accepted.
- 3) Private Prayer concerns the sanctification of the individual soul by the indwelling spirit of the glory of God. (In private prayer - meditation, recollection, self-examination and so on - we are receiving the love of God by way of surrender to the power of the Paraclete immanently indwelling).¹⁴

¹² Martin Thornton, Christian Proficiency (London: S.P.C.K., 1961), p. 49.

¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴ Thornton, Pastoral Theology, pp. 205-206.

To avoid legalism in this discipline and the countless other disciplines designed to aid one in his willful seeking after God, the presupposition of God's prevenience is always held. A rule, "presupposes a soul enlightened by the living Spirit of Christ, it has no use at all for the dead letter of the Law."¹⁵ Also, to avoid individualism or isolationist tendencies in prayer, the rule strives to make prayer a corporate effort, thereby strengthening not only the individual but the entire Mystical Body of the Church. Since the rule is not individualistic it must always be of a general and flexible nature so as to allow for the uniqueness of the individual involved; and since the rule is not legalistic, i.e., it is a means to an end and not an end in itself, it can never be said that one has committed a sin if he should violate some aspect of the rule - rather it must be seen that he has sinned against the end for which the rule has been provided.

In prayer, under the discipline of a rule, the mind is willfully lifted up to become one with God. This is a volitional act with the end in view that to be in union with

¹⁵ Thornton, Christian Proficiency, p. 47.

God is better than anything the mind can attain to - the finite finds its end in the infinite. "'When I seek Thee, my God,' prays Augustine, 'I seek a blessed life.' His words uncover the psychical root of all prayer... it is always a great longing for life, for a more potent, a purer, a more blessed life."¹⁶

To give credulity to volitional prayer in this modern age it must be given an epistemological status. Without this status prayer will remain suspect. To find the essence of this epistemological status in prayer, "we must make clear the religious ideas of him who prays in simplicity, we must grasp his inner attitude and spiritual aim, the intellectual presuppositions which underlie prayer as a psychical experience."¹⁷ If there are no 'intellectual presuppositions' then prayer is little better than the activity carried on by the spiritualist in a seance.

In the introduction to this paper we talked of Kant's definition of a 'synthetic a priori judgement' and its relation to the 'transcendental idea.' Our necessary intellectual presuppositions are found precisely in these

¹⁶ Heiler, Prayer, p. 355.

¹⁷ Ibid.

definitions. To illustrate this it will be necessary to quote Heiler's distinction between primary and secondary types of prayer.

- A. The primary types which cannot be confounded with the others are these: - the naive prayer of primitive man, the devotional life of men of religious genius, the prayer of great men, the common prayer of public worship in so far as it has not hardened into a stiff, sacro-sancit institution. In all these instances prayer appears as a purely psychical fact, the immediate expression of an original and profound experience of the soul. It bursts forth with innate energy.
- B. The secondary types are no longer an original, personal experience, but an imitation or a congealment of such a living experience. The personal prayer of the over age religious man is a more or less true reflection of the original experience of another; it remains inferior to the ideal model in power, depth and vitality. The philosophical idea of prayer is a cold abstraction built up in harmony with metaphysical and ethical standards; by living prayer is subjected to an alien law, to the principles of philosophy, and is transformed and revised in accordance with the law.¹⁸

Although the latter type of prayer would at first glance tend to refute the thesis so far, it must be noted that in order to talk about and explain the primary type of prayer one needs to use the terminology of the secondary type. This is, then, exactly what Heiler is trying to get across

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 354.

in his distinction; i.e. that the primary type is the fact or existence of prayer, and that the secondary is merely talk about this fact or primary type of prayer. Now, concerning the primary type of prayer, we can see grounds for our intellectual presupposition. In this innate response of the soul we see Kant's synthetic a priori judgement at work. The soul does not speculate as to the actual existence of the object or person responded to (i.e. God), but responds to the experience of coming into contact with the fact of God's existence. It can be said that what happens in prayer is similar to what happens in our relations with other finite beings. When I am confronted with another, I am responding to that person's existential presence as it is a fact before me. When that person is no longer present, I can respond to his image in the same way; i.e., his image now becomes for me the fact of his existence to be known. In prayer I respond to the image of God which for me at that moment is the fact of His existence. Obviously there is one vital difference between the experience of God in prayer as described here in epistemological terms, and my imaged experience of a person. This difference is that I have at one time or another experienced that person, and not his

image. With Christ this is not possible. Correction for this 'time-eternal' problem is accomplished however by what Thornton calls "faith-venture."

The time-eternal sacrament is only the theological basis of our faith in the Presence of a living and glorified Christ in his divine Humanity. To imagine this Presence is no more vain than the 'imaging' of present company by a blind man, or the imaging of an absent friend. Just as sense impression precedes a deeper knowledge of persons in social relationships, so the imaged Christ is the only first step to a deeper knowledge of him in prayer.¹⁹

Or, in Heiler's words:

...to pray means to speak to and have intercourse with God, as suppliant with judge, servant with master, child with father, bride with bridegroom.²⁰

The epistemological status given to prayer is found in the mental image of God seen in Christ. This is likened unto Kant's 'synthetic a priori judgement' and Thornton's 'faith-venture.' The two are one in the same in that both lead one to know God. Both are the innate response to the fact of God's existence; neither of them speculates about that existence, but affirms it as a fact, whether it be imagined or experienced face to face. Both the imagined and the face-

¹⁹ Thornton, Pastoral Theology, p. 238.

²⁰ Heiler, Prayer, p. 362.

to-face experience are experiences of reality, or rather, of the fact of reality, and essential to this experience is its time-eternal nature. That is to say, that man's relationship with the image of God seen in Christ, in prayer, is personal and living, just as man's relationships are with his fellow man.

Prayer is, therefore, a living communion of the religious man with God, conceived as personal and present in experience, a communion which reflects the forms of the social relations of humanity.²¹

Prayer is a social phenomenon. It is communion with another subject and not the object of our own subjective projections. Just as we can use (abuse) people by making them objects - that is, dependent upon our subjective awareness of them as objects for their identity - so we can use (abuse) prayer by making God or the image we hold of Him, merely an object to satisfy a subjective need. Herein lies the mistake of those who would adore God to the point of being absorbed into His very being. Adoration requires an object to be adored and thereby defeats the purpose of prayer. If prayer is to bring about union with God, then to make Him an object of prayer merely widens the gap between the subject of prayer,

²¹ Ibid., p. 358.

or the person praying, and the object of that prayer. Whereas if God is imaged as a subject, that is if he is responded to as a fact of existence and not explained or defined in his existence, the relationship between God and Man in prayer can be one of personal communion. In order to transcend the distance between Man and God in prayer we must maintain the intellectual presupposition that God is personal (a subject) responded to as an a priori fact of existence. In Heiler's words:

Prayer is a living relation of man to God, a direct and inner contact...Since prayer displays a communion, a conversation between an 'I' and a 'Thou,' it is a social phenomenon. The relation to God of him who prays always reflects an earthly social relation: that of servant or child or friend or bride. It is just this earthly social element that lends to natural prayer its dramatic vivacity. Wherever, as with many mystics, the religious relation no longer exhibits an analogy to social relations, prayer passes over from a real relation of communion to mere contemplation and adoration.²²

There is an attempt being made by those concerned with the effects of Ascetical Theology such as Martin Thornton, a contemporary Anglican Ascetical Theologian, to bridge the gap between the God man meets in prayer and the God Incarnate that he must meet in his daily existence. That is, he is attempting

²² Ibid., p. 357.

to make prayer prophetic; he is attempting to make prayer practical. He writes that, "It is axiomatic to spiritual theology that progress is tested not by experience or feeling but by moral theology."²³

To accomplish this end, that is, to make prayer practical, we have seen how prayer has been defined not as analytic or speculative but synthetic and innate.

Its terms (prayers) are synthetic not analytic: 'spirituality' is not pietism but the total practice of every aspect of Christian living. A 'spiritual' life is one in which the spirit of God, sought and nurtured in prayer, controls its every minute and every aspect.²⁴

Heiler, in his classic volume on prayer, also aims at these same ends.

Prayer appears in history in an astonishing multiplicity of forms...(and) as an earnest desire for power in the moral struggle of existence.²⁵

and,

The effort to fortify, to reinforce, to enhance one's life is the motive of all prayer.²⁶

²³ Thornton, English Spirituality, p. 22.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁵ Heiler, Prayer, p. 353

²⁶ Ibid., p. 355

Prayer must be seen within a metaphysical system if it is to relate to social existence. This is not to say, however, that man's knowledge of the ultimate nature of reality (God), which lies beyond his experience of natural objects, cannot be experienced existentially. If this has not been made clear by the explanation in this chapter of the epistemological nature of prayer, then it is hoped that in the next chapter and in the concluding chapter the point will be made clear. The experience of communion that man has with God in prayer is at once free from metaphysical speculation about an ultimate 'nature,' while at the same time remaining within this metaphysics. This is accomplished by the particular epistemological approach we have defined and is manifest in an existential awareness of one subject with the fact of another subject. That the validity of such an a priori encounter does in truth take place in prayer is supported by what Thornton calls a 'faith-venture.' God is experienced as existence beyond existence, as a fact and not an hypothesis to be analyzed and defined. Finally, we have noted that, just as we define the activity of prayer in social terms, so prayer manifests its effectiveness in the behavioral relationships of person within a social setting.

Christianity is a two-way religion. Because it is Incarnational it concerns both our relation with God to be sought and adored, and with the human world to be served and loved. ...A man's influence on his neighbour depends on his relation with God, the Church's impact on the world flows from her adoration: that is why our religion must forgo the pleasures of a mere piety for spiritual efficiency.²⁷

We will now move on to see how man's knowledge of God is seen to effect his social and ethical existence. To do this we will look at what is commonly called the 'New Theology.' However, it will be noted that in the next chapter we will be examining a system of theology which looks at prayer in a decidedly different light than we have seen presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE 'NEW THEOLOGY' APPROACH TO PRAYER

Our task in this chapter will be to find out what the so-called New Theology that has come out of the Cambridge Circuit is saying about prayer in general and about prayer in particular, that is, about prayer as it was defined in the preceding chapter.

Since we have already defined prayer according to contemporary ascetical theological standards, it only remains that we define what is meant by the New Theology before we begin our examination. This is far easier said than done. Dr. Vidler, a champion of the New Theology and editor of the recent publication Soundings, speaks for most of the New Theologians when he says that the task of theology in the Twentieth Century is to discover the questions the world is asking and not to hope for answers for some time to come. One of the contributors to Dr. Vidler's book, Howard E. Root, writes:

We (the Christian Church) shall have come to terms with a world in which old patterns of morality no longer direct or inspire because they no longer have life. We shall have to admit that we have no ready answers to the questions people ask because for so

long we have insulated ourselves against their questions. Christian faith has been an ark of retreat. We could shut ourselves inside it when the pressure upon our lives and imagination seemed to lead to nameless perils. We have relied upon the several establishments, religious, political, and moral, to protect us from the barbarians. Our first lesson will be to learn that our greatest ally is not the dying establishments but the hungry and destitute world which is still alive enough to feel its own hunger. The starting-point for natural theology is not argument but sharpened awareness. For the moment it is better for us that the arguments have fallen to pieces.²⁸

It would appear, then, that we are going to have to define the New Theology in terms of what it is trying to do and not in terms as to what it is. Taking our cue from the quote above it might be said that in seeking out the questions being asked in the so-called secular world there is an effort being made by Twentieth Century 'new' theologians to bring God out of the blue and down to earth. The problem is one of relevancy and is very similar to the problem the ascetical theologian faced in making the God of prayer relevant to behavioral problems faced in daily existence. The use of God by the church, as Root has indicated, as an escape valve from

²⁸ Howard E. Root, "Beginning all over Again," Soundings, A. R. Vidler (ed.) (Cambridge: The University Press, 1963), p. 19.

the natural habitat of man is proving less and less effective in this century. As the Twentieth Century man becomes more and more self-sufficient his need for a God 'out there' diminishes. The new theologian is finding out that God can no longer be relegated to the periphery of life to act only as a deus en Machina. Man is discovering that he lacks the necessary integrity of being a responsible person if God is allowed to retain this position of being 'out there' merely for the purpose of offering man some abstract justification for his existence.

Once more [writes Bonhoeffer] God cannot wait until we are at the end of our tether; he must be found at the centre of life: in life and not only in suffering; in activity, and not only in sin....Christ is the centre of life, and in no sense did he come to answer our unsolved problems.²⁹

In an effort to bring God down to earth the new theologian is looking for the answer to the problem man faces as he seeks freedom; i.e., not freedom from life, but freedom in life. In life and its bifurcated nature, i.e. between such alternatives as the law and love, man must be given something that will help him deal with his tensions

²⁹D. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 191.

and not something that will help him avoid them. "Tension is one of the conditions of creativeness, and does in fact produce a positive good which, apart from the tension, would not be possible for us," ³⁰ states The Reverend Roger Lloyd in his latest book, The Ferment in the Church. That 'positive good' which Lloyd refers to is the freedom man can experience in dealing with his tensions. This freedom is such that in the eyes of the New Theology, man must be free from God also; the God which Bishop Robinson refers to as being 'up there.' The phrase 'God is dead,' which is being used with ever increasing frequency these days, is the expression both in word and deed of the Twentieth Century man's longing for freedom. In other words, God is dead in his metaphysical habitation and there is no 'hope in heaven.'

The attack on metaphysics by those of the New Theology has been vigorous while at the same time showing a certain amount of uncertainty and clarity, which usually is the result of a theologian's venture into the world of philosophical concepts. In bringing the first round of the Honest to God

³⁰ Roger Lloyd, The Ferment in the Church (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1964), p.96.

debate 'to a constructive close,' Bishop Robinson writes:

Whether, or in what sense, the Gospel can be given expression without recourse to metaphysical statements I do not know. That is why I have left the issue open. So much depends on what one means by metaphysics, and I am not a linguistic philosopher.³¹

The problem of metaphysics for the New Theology stems, I believe, from the strong incarnational element in their approach. In tracing the historical growth of the New Man, Dr. Smith equates metaphysics with the Middle Ages and finds such a system, no longer applicable to the present state of man's advanced self-awareness. "In Dilthy's words," he quotes, 'it was metaphysics as theology which was the real bond which in the Middle Ages held together religion, learning and art, the different sides of the intellectual and spiritual life.'³² The break between a metaphysical or an existential outlook toward the world came as man gained in self-understanding, i.e. in man's understanding of his role in history.

31

Robinson, "The Debate Continues," The Honest To God Debate, D. L. Edwards (ed.) (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 249.

32

R. G. Smith, The New Man (London, SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p. 37. (quoted from W. Dilthy, Einleitung in die Geisteswissen-schaften, 365 f.)

He (man) saw [writes Smith] himself as free, and as responsible for making his own life, and as open to a future which was not an arbitrary or threatening disposition of fate, but was awaiting him as his own destiny. History came to be seen as the way in which man understood his own being as the free and responsible climax to his given situation.³³

The inevitable outcome of such a view if Christianity was to maintain its influence in the world was to emphasize the doctrine of the Incarnation. "And this indeed seems to me," writes Smith, "to be one inescapable consequence of any doctrine of the Incarnation, of God becoming man, namely, that man in history is the important matter."³⁴ In discouraging the foundation of a Christian theology of prayer, therefore, on metaphysical assumptions, and centering it rather on the nature of the Gospel and the doctrine of the Incarnation, the new theologians have attempted to bring the God of our prayers down to earth. Burnaby, in his essay on "Christian Prayer" in Soundings, also presses for a non-metaphysical understanding of God in prayer. He writes:

To believe in the gospel of the Incarnation is to believe that God's way of ending the separation between himself and sinful man was

³³ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

not to wait till men should return to him, but to go where they were and to stay there.³⁵

This, then, is one direction in which the New Theology is moving, i.e., they are dealing with the problem of bringing God down to earth and out of his metaphysical habitation. In doing so they feel that they are approaching an answer to the question the Twentieth Century Christian man is asking; i.e., How do I maintain my sense of responsibility and freedom while at the same time satisfy my Christian duty to grow spiritually? In other words, the Twentieth Century Christian wants to know how he can be "holy" in the world.

The direction in which the question seems to be leading is toward what Robinson calls 'Worldly Holiness.' It is a synthesis that is sought after in this particular view of holiness, a synthesis between what is commonly referred to as secular and its antithesis, the 'religious.' One area in which the Church needs to be set straight, writes Lloyd, is in the fatal distinction they have made between "what is religious and what is secular, which encouraged some men to

³⁵ J. Burnaby, "Christian Prayer" in Soundings, p. 229.

find God only in religious activities, and discouraged more from finding him at all. He is, in fact, in the heart of all life everywhere; and, therefore, the distinction between religious and secular must go....They (the Churches) must, in a word, show that worldliness can be holy."³⁶ Dr. Smith concurs by stating that both the Old and New Testament support the view that we do not exist in a "two-fold system with nature and super-nature neatly dovetailed into one another, but one world, into which God's Word penetrated."³⁷

In describing what is meant by Worldly Holiness, Bishop Robinson makes this sharp distinction between what is religious, 'in the technical sense of the religious orders' and what is secular, or the antithesis of 'religious.' It is his feeling that the Church is primarily interested in the 'religious' and only secondarily interested in the secular. The pervasive nature of such a view is then examined by the Bishop in the area of worship and private prayer. Our concern will be with the latter.

³⁶ Lloyd, The Ferment in the Church, p. 75.

³⁷ Smith, The New Man, p. 45.

He begins by assuming "that the heart of prayer is withdrawal."³⁸ It is withdrawal or disengagement to 'be with God?' In this way he contrasts what he terms 'engagement,' as meaning activity in 'the world.' The norm for prayer or one's spiritual life and the source from which he has formed his definition of disengagement and engagement is the religious community. Their witness to the 'religious life' or spiritual life is one of total withdrawal. (This would hold true for the so-called semi-contemplative orders or working orders, since the basis of all their work is prayer in a state of withdrawal.) Because this has been the norm since medieval times and because the cleavage between the religious communities and the secular world has expanded into an immense chasm the Christian in the world is led more and more into a sense of guilt over his failure at finding time to withdraw into prayer. The conclusion for many - Bishop Robinson being one - is that they are just not 'the praying type.' In referring to Dr. Macleod's book Only One Way Left, the Bishop remarks that "Dr. Macleod makes something of the

³⁸ J. A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1964) p. 92.

same point as Bonhoeffer when he says that our greatest difficulty is 'our difference from medieval man, when so many of our "aids to prayer" stem from a medieval pattern.'"³⁹

As we might expect the Bishop seriously doubts whether we should consider "prayer in terms of the times we set aside."

I wonder whether Christian prayer, prayer in the light of the Incarnation, is not to be defined in terms of penetration through the world to God rather than of withdrawal from the world to God. For the moment of revelation is precisely so often, in my experience, the moment of meeting and unconditional engagement....And this activity, undertaken by a Christian trusting and expecting that God is there, would seem to be prayer.⁴⁰

Up to this point there seems to be some consistency in Robinson's approach. There seems to be ample evidence attesting to the fact that the norm for prayer is becoming less and less applicable in the Twentieth Century secular situation, and there seems to be a great deal of truth, in fact, that Christians are experiencing close to complete failure in trying to commune with a God 'out there' in prayer. His attempt has been to bring God into the center of the world and our activity. In Bonhoeffer's words, "God then becomes

³⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

the 'beyond' in the midst of our life." In this way, Bonhoeffer goes on, "the Church stands not where human powers give out, on the borders, but in the centre of the villages."⁴¹

What do we do now that God has been brought down from his metaphysical habitation and into the 'midst of our life?' It is in answering this question, particularly with reference to prayer, that there appears to be some vital inconsistencies. God, no longer subject to metaphysical description, becomes, in Tillich's words, the 'Ground of Being.' "When Tillich speaks of God in depth" writes Robinson, "he is not speaking of another Being at all. He is speaking of 'The infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being,' of our ultimate concern, of what we take seriously without reservation."⁴² Now the problem of theology to account for, in logical terms, the idea of transcendency between an infinite and a finite Being, appears to become somewhat less of a problem. In the Bishop's words "Theology is not making affirmations about metaphysical realities *per se*, but always describes an experienced relationship or engagement to the

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, p. 166.

⁴² Robinson, Honest to God, p. 46.

truth."⁴³ The 'truth' is our ultimate concern, that is, God in an existential context. Recalling our explanation in the introduction of the empirical evidence offered by the existentialist for the encounter of his own self with another self, we can see that "we may escape this logical prison (i.e. of explaining the experience of transcendence) by realizing that it is a question of fact, not of definition, whether we are imprisoned."⁴⁴

What we have now according to Robinson, is the existential truth ('fact') of God's presence in the world. However, this is not to be interpreted as a Being above or beyond other Beings, but rather the 'Ground of all Being.' The problem of which I spoke is evident now when we ask the question (along with countless others who have concerned themselves with Bishop Robinson's book): 'How do you pray to the Ground of Being?' Although Robinson later admits to the belief in a personal God, one can only conclude that God, as a Ground of Being is impersonal.

⁴³ Robinson, "The Debate Continues," The Honest to God Debate, p. 252.

⁴⁴ G. F. Woods, "The Transcendent," Soundings, p. 50.

The unresolved problem of whether or not there is a personal God with whom one may commune in prayer is seen quite clearly in two conflicting statements made by Robinson on this issue. In Honest to God he describes prayer (intercession) as exposing "both oneself and (another) to the common ground of our being; it is to see one's concern for him in terms of ultimate concern, to let God into the relationship."⁴⁵ However, according to our definition of 'Ground of Being' it must be concluded that the 'God' let into our relationship is not a Being; i.e. a personal Being (a subject). Later, in answering criticism raised over the question 'How do you pray to the ground of your being?', he states that, "I would say at once that I do not pray to the ground of my being. I pray to God as Father."⁴⁶ At one moment he sees God as impersonal, i.e. as the ground of being, and the next as personal i.e. the Thou in an I-Thou relationship.

'Worldly Holiness' as seeking God in the Existential predicament of life is a needed concept and worthy of the pursuit of the Church. However, there must be a way in which

⁴⁵ Robinson, Honest to God, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Robinson, "The Debate Continues", p. 262.

this can be pursued without the loss of God's Personhood.

"Our devotion in prayer and our devotion in action are equally components of our worship and self-surrender."⁴⁷ This 'self-surrender' needs, nay, demands a 'Subject' to which it can surrender. In abolishing 'Theism,' which Robinson advocates in an earlier chapter in Honest to God, he has cut himself off from that 'Subject.' For it is essential in theism "that God, as the ground of the universe, must be an intelligent and ethical being. Thought of as apart from and prior to his world, God becomes a cosmologically useless idea. We can no more conceive a transition from a universeless God to God and a universe than logically move from an absolute one to a finite many....We should conceive the Divine nature as including more than human personality measurably perfect with capacities beyond our understanding as human knowledge transcends the cognition of an insect."⁴⁸ The personality of 'the ground of our being' which Robinson at once affirms and denies might be seen with more clarity and consistency if he were to look for

⁴⁷ Alec Graham, "A Review," The Honest to God Debate, p. 126.

⁴⁸J. S. Bezzant, "Intellectual Objections", Objections to Christian Belief D. M. MacKinnon et.al. (eds.) (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964)

the 'personality' in God rather than the personality of God. I think this is essentially what he is doing, but has in his efforts failed to convey his point clearly.

It is my feeling that the key to any further understanding of a God as 'Subject,' both in prayerful action and worship and within the rational proofs of metaphysics and the empirical proofs of existentialism lies in a clearer definition of the uncondition which Tillich, Robinson and others involved in the New Theology repeatedly use. "To open oneself to another unconditionally in love is to be with him in the presence of God."⁴⁹ If we are to bring the God who is the subject of our prayer into a working relation with the world in which we live and have our being, then we must understand the unconditional element in both prayer and action. This will be our concern in the Third and Final Chapter.

⁴⁹ Robinson, Honest to God, p. 99.

CHAPTER III

THE UNCONDITIONAL ETHIC OF PRAYER

We are now in what Bishop Pike calls in his new book, A Time for Christian Candor, a 'theological revolution.' Theology, riding the crest of the wave of Biblical criticism begun in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, is reshaping the mold, casting a 'new image.' Emerging from this new mold is the Twentieth Century Christian Man resplendent in his vis-a-vis relationship with the Incarnate Word of God. He is existentially free, i.e. free to conceive of his own Being, as being the starting point of all his activity. In other words, his existence counts; he is worth something and the life he lives 'makes a difference.' God too, is seen through new glasses, for by the revelation of himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, man no longer has to rely on statements about God, but is confronted with existential truths that are self-authenticating in and through the life Christ led.

Within these new surroundings man is at first mesmerized by the novelty of the change, but soon the ineluctable exigency

of responding in new ways to the creative power of God's grace and gift of freedom becomes apparent. He finds that abstract theological principles extolling the virtue of freedom must be expressed in concrete activity, and at this point man becomes once again troubled. How, he asks, am I to respond? How am I to do the will of God? In this chapter we will look for an answer to these questions within the context of what Tillich and others have called the 'moral imperative,' or what Kant has called the 'categorical imperative.' This is, in Tillich's words, "the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons."⁵⁰ God's will is that man should will. Each decision-making situation is the occasion for man to use his own will. The intrinsic character of this word 'imperative' allows man to become fully a person in each decision he makes, and this fills him with the joy of being counted worthy to handle such a responsibility. However, it also confronts him with the uncertainty of not having an imposed external law on which to base his decision, and the uncertainty of not knowing the exact limits of the result of his decision. This dilemma, this tension in living out the word 'imperative' is what Robinson defines as "meeting the

⁵⁰ P. Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) p. 19.

unconditional in the conditional in unconditional personal relationship."⁵¹

To understand what Robinson defines as 'unconditional' and 'conditional' let us briefly turn to a description of the same, found in Tillich's Morality and Beyond.

We may ask, however, whether a moral decision can stand under an unconditional imperative if the decision is a moral risk - the 'risk' implying that it might prove to be the wrong decision. The answer to this question is that the unconditional character does not refer to the context, but to the form of moral decision. Whichever side of a moral alternative might be chosen, however great the risk in a bold decision may be, if it be a moral decision it is dependent only on the pure 'ought to be' of the moral imperative. And should anyone be in doubt as to which of several possible acts conforms to the moral imperative, he should be reminded that each of them might be justified in a particular situation, but that whatever he chooses must be done with the consciousness of standing under an unconditional imperative. The doubt concerning the justice of a moral act does not contradict the certainty of its ultimate seriousness.⁵²

In our response to God and to our fellow man we are subject only to the 'unconditional' character of the 'moral imperative,' which is to use our will to become fully a person. We can no longer find security - choosing between

⁵¹ Robinson, Honest to God, p. 105.

⁵² Tillich, Morality and Beyond, p. 23.

a good and a bad - for this is the 'conditional' response, which results in becoming less of a person. The tragedy of acting under the unconditioned is that we must choose between two potential 'goods,' with no certainty that our choice will be the right one. There can be no 'right one,' for if there were we would be responding to an extrinsic and conditioned moral imperative that would rob the individual of his personhood and God's gift of free will. If I am faced with two alternatives in a decision-making situation, the one 'A,' defined as the 'right one,' and the other 'B,' defined as the 'wrong one,' I am not free in making my choice. The 'conditions' of both choices are already in the alternatives and independent of my involvement in them. By choosing 'A' I do not become a better person because, in effect I have not done anything to become a better person. I have reacted, nay, been compelled to react, by vitute of the fact that the conditions inherent in the choice itself resulted in the loss of my being able to freely accept the effect of the choice.

Faced with right and wrong alternatives in our relations with God and with our fellow man robs us of our unique gift as men to respond freely and unconditionally. Therefore we violate the 'moral imperative' of the 'New Man

in the Twentieth Century,' which is to become what we 'ought to become,' a person within a community of persons. God became, in His Incarnation, a person in a community of persons and this gives us the unconditioned 'ought' for our behavior as Christians. It is with this 'ought' of ethical behavior for the Christian within the context of prayer that I would now like to deal. Robinson wrote that "prayer and ethics are simply the inside and outside of the same thing."⁵³ The 'same thing' is the unconditional, 'moral imperative' to become a person, and it is the 'risk' of following this imperative in prayer and in our ethical behavior that we are to examine. In doing so, we will be brought to the point where, "exercising our freedom in finitude, we decide to take either the risk of faith or the risk of unfaith."⁵⁴

One day Manjusri stood outside that gate when Buddha called to him. 'Manjusri, Manjusri, why do you not enter?'

'I do not see a thing outside the gate. Why should I enter?' Manjusri answered.

(From The Iron Flute - a Zen koān)

An explanation of the above is of course a betrayal

⁵³ Robinson, Honest to God, p. 105.

⁵⁴ J. Macquarrie, "How is Theology Possible?", The Honest to God Debate, p. 193.

of the author's intent; however, since we are going to be dealing with a 'risk' throughout this chapter we might as well begin now and risk a definition. In this dialogue between Buddha and Manjusri we see the former testing the latter's ability to abide in a state of desirelessness. There is nothing beyond the Zen Buddhist's awareness, for in his awareness are all things. Manjusri's response lets Buddha know that although he stands outside the gate in a temporal sense he is free from the restrictions this positioning might impose upon the mind, and can answer as if he were on the inside looking out. The state of awareness, here expressed, is one of desirelessness as it should be held in one's prayers or meditations, and in one's subsequent behavior. To the Western mind, as, indeed to the Eastern mind as well, this presents itself as a very desirable state. It is with this last sentence that we begin our betrayal of the author's intent in this Koān, for the problem has now become apparent. How do we not desire the desirability of desirelessness?

But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be yours as well.

Matt. 6:33.

God is here calling us from the other side of the gate to enter. We are being called to seek; to desire to enter in

is what God would have us to do. There appears no place here for the answer: "I do not see a thing outside the gate. Why should I enter?" For to answer in this way would surely be looked upon as blasphemy. And yet, is this not a possible answer, nay, the answer, that can and must be given in both our response of prayer and our response of ethical behavior to the call of God coming from inside the gate? I believe it is the answer to God's call to seek Him and His righteousness, and the answer that will lead us to the result of such an action, which is that "...all these things shall be yours as well." This is God's unconditional moral imperative which we ought to seek if we are to become what He desires us to become, a person, possessing all things. Our answer, to seek His Kingdom, can be the ultimately serious answer, "I do not see a thing outside heaven. Why should I enter?"

How can this be, you will ask? For it is obvious, you will say, that the answer, "I do not see a thing outside the gate (heaven)" is inactive and therefore requires no response at all, either in prayer or in ethical behavior. There is no seeking here, no desire, for indeed, obviously nothing is seen to be desired. The answer to the contradiction of call and response and their unconditional character must be explored.

The assumptions upon which we will proceed are in themselves also contradictory, but I believe we will find out they are contradictory only when looked at as conditional. On the one hand, we will assume and try to go on to show that in our relations with God in prayer, and in our relations with God and our fellow man in life's activity, we are seeking to commune with God, or in fact, through involvement to become one with Him. On the other hand, we will assume and again, go on to try to show that it is the very desire to complete this union that keeps us from accomplishing our purpose. To read further, you will say, is a waste of time (a 'risk') for it is obvious that from these antimonies no conclusion could possibly be drawn. I could not agree with you more fully if it is conclusions for which you are looking; however, it is not conclusions that we are after, but propositions. The nature of all theological thinking of which ethics and prayer are an integral part is propositional and not conclusive. From the point of view of reason, ethics is never quite right. It is the moral and faith proposition that we will be aiming for and that, if at all practical, will help us to seek without seeking to seek in our prayer and in our behavior, and thereby bring us to possess all things as well as God from within the

tension of existence.

Explicit within the definition of communion is the idea that there exists a certain separation, else why the need for communion? If I am to communicate with my roommate or my wife or the bus driver, I must become actively involved in some form of communication that is designed to overcome the separation. Whether this communication takes the form of a gesture or a word or a group of words, its purpose will be to break down the barrier of separation between us - it must possess the ability to enter the gate of the other person, to step outside one's own gate while remaining one's self, or, if you will, to transcend the distance between the two persons as it exists in space and time.

To be aware of this necessity of transcending in our relationships with our fellow man points to our existential predicament of aloneness. The more acute the necessity for this transcending becomes the more acute our aloneness and the more compelling is the desire to transcend. So we find ourselves in what has been referred to in philosophical circles as the 'egocentric predicament.' The more one is aware of the need to transcend the distance between his ego and another, the more he is aware of his own ego, and the more he becomes

aware of his own ego, the more he is aware of his need to transcend it. Round and round one goes, tormented by his aloneness and by his desire to overcome the aloneness.

The certitude emanating from man's nature to achieve temporal communion with his fellow man bathes in the light of the intuitive and more devastating truism that, between man and God there also exists this separation. Again, man is compelled to seek communion with his 'true light.' The more he tries to commune with this light, the light of God, the more aware of his creatureliness or finiteness he becomes and the more aware he becomes of the creator, or the infinite nature of God. By definition he is aware of the finite's inability to participate in the infinite, yet he is driven by his own need to become a whole person to seek this participation. In his prayer he becomes more painfully aware of the absurdity of his endeavors, yet, through devices derived from his experiencing the processes of temporal communion, i.e. discipline, words, body positioning, etc., he continues to try. If he stops trying he is driven to his aloneness, which is intolerable, and then is further driven to means of escape which have only ephemeral relief from this undesirable state. He cries out for someone to dip their finger in the

in the eternal waters of heaven and come cool his parched tongue, and is answered with these words:

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Ju. 4:13-14

Before we begin to look at the long-term or eternal relief, which is the relief found in the water promised to us by Christ, (i.e. the unconditional moral imperative) it might be well to look at some of the less satisfying 'ways.' First, to facilitate matters, we will take a look at those means primarily employed to break down the barrier between God and man, the residual effect being a breakdown of barriers between man and his fellows. Next, a quick look at the reverse approach, i.e., attempts made to bridge the gap between men, thereby hoping to bridge the gap between man and God.

I am not capable, drawing upon my memory, to trace accurately the high points in history where the quest for individual enlightenment occupied the major part of man's thinking. However, certain figures do come to mind, such as Socrates and his oft quoted dictum 'know thyself.' Another who could probably be considered as one of the fathers of the

so-called "enlightenment period" is Descartes and his more famous statement "Cogito, ergo sum," (I think, therefore I am). These philosophers and countless others have paved the way of man's seeking after greater consciousness. But, as we have noted, with an increase of self-awareness there come heightened sensitivity to one's existential aloneness. This attitude of separation has for Christianity been the source and result of man's sin. It is for this reason, therefore, that we find man struggling to lose this sense of consciousness, which keeps him from God and man and in a constant state of sin. Those best representing this struggle are most commonly referred to as 'religious,' or those that live a monastic existence.

The by-word for the religious has always been some form of the word 'detachment;' i.e., withdrawal, disengagement, etc. The reason for this is that in the state of sin (i.e. separation) there is a conscious tension between the individual and the thing or person desired, be it God, another individual or an inanimate object. If there were no tension, it is thought, then there could be a unity or a oneness of all persons and things, and consequently a sinless state which can only be described in terms such as heaven,

bliss, happiness, etc. Then the thing to desire is a loss of self, thereby a loss of separateness, thereby a sinless state of existence where all is one.

The methods devised for the achievement of these ends are varied, but central to all of them is the idea of detachment. And why detachment? Because the universal presupposition made is that God is above all else, infinite. He is without those limitations that man in his finiteness finds himself bound to, and is therefore a transcendent God, in that to know him one must transcend the boundaries of finiteness. If a dog finds he cannot reach the walk to sink his teeth into the intriguing blue material worn by the postman due to his leash, he sets about to free himself from that leash in order to accomplish his desire. It is being detached from that which has forced a limited existence in his life that will release him into the tensionless completion of his desire. This, for the dog, is bliss, for what is happiness in a dog's life? Happiness is a dog with a piece of the mailman's uniform between his teeth!

For man, the sinless state of union with God is most desirable if it is thought to be a state in which freedom is

gained from the tension-producing desires of this life.

Short of death, there appears to be only one answer to this freedom and that is a detachment from everything and everyone that is tension producing. To be desireless - and here we shall see again wherein the difficulty with this means of attempting union through the practice of detachment lies - is to be desired. If money is the source of desire and it is recognized that this is keeping one from union with the infinite, then detachment from money is necessary. If friends and relatives are tension-producing and involve one so completely in the realm of infinite things then the infinite is to be sought after through detaching oneself from the finite. If the following of one's own finite instincts is keeping the same from the infinite then it is best one free himself from himself.

All these value choices seem perfectly logical, yet the method by which one goes about trying to accomplish these truths is illogical. If one tries to build a logical structure for his value choices he most likely will be lead to the exact end which he has been trying to avoid, and that is the 'self.' We can easily see this if we consider briefly

the problem of how a 'self' tries to rid itself of itself.

Can I be conscious of consciousness? Certainly I cannot.

How do I know that I am? According to Descartes, I know because I am conscious of myself. If this be true then, how if the consciousness or selfness state of separation be eradicated by a self or consciousness, which first had to be aware of itself to know that the separation existed, can one be conscious of the consciousless state in which the separation no longer exists? It is illogical to presume that the self can rid itself of the self. The only knowledge of such a state being achieved comes from being conscious, which is what one was attempting to rid himself of in the first place. The same argument holds true for detachment from others and from things.

It can readily be seen why such a method of detachment can be the most selfish means of going about trying to accomplish union. In detachment we are attempting to be above the world and above mankind, and this can lead one into the danger zone of spiritual pride. "If God is not too proud to keep the world in being, who is man to turn his back on it?...The continued existence of the phenomenal world, then, is of

importance to God: he cares."⁵⁵ Therefore,... "We ought to love God in our lives...for, the important thing is to keep step with God, and not get a step or two in front of him."⁵⁶ In failing to see the truth of this, the self in its efforts to detach itself, becomes the sole emphasis of the union, and, therefore, it is only the individual's salvation that is sought after. Prayers may be offered for others, but of primary concern is the individual state of union. The concern is with the self and its attempts to rid itself of itself, so that it may be one with God and then one with all of mankind. This is a desirable state, for to be one with God could be nothing less than desirable, as we have already noted, and yet to desire is to acknowledge the self which is not desirable. We find ourselves in a circle again - the self chasing its own tail.

Many have seen the absurdity of this religious tail chasing, and have turned to the finite for answers to man's predicament of aloneness, at the exclusion of any sense of the infinite. Such attempts are easily seen in the empirical

⁵⁵ R. C. Zaehner, Matter and Spirit (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 119

⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 113.

movements, most prominently having been developed from the time of philosophers such as Berkeley, Locke and Hume. Today, we have the product of the linguistic-positivists as they have come to us out of the Vienna Circle in the great existentialist movement fathered by men like Sartre.

The trend is easy to distinguish. Disillusioned by religious tail-chasing, the fifteenth and sixteenth century world began to look to temporal proofs to the question concerning man's existence. Some found very few satisfactory answers and began to rely heavily on faith for their security. Others, however, set about the task of proving existence on the grounds of empirically verifiable evidence. If man could prove that he existed by his own conscious recognition of this existence, why could he not prove not only the necessity for this existence, but also the necessity and existence of other men and of other objects of his perception. The future looked bright for some time until, through logic, man realized that empirically verifiable proof for the existence of objects outside the self was not available. Without resorting to a proof outside the self, the only answer seemed to lie in the avoidance of seeking to prove the necessity for or the existence

of anything outside the self. This has resulted in the desperation of the existentialist; self-gods, dependent on nothing save themselves for the essence of their existence.

Sartre writes:

...there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence...Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself, rather like a patch of moss, a piece of garbage, or a cauliflower; nothing exists prior⁵⁷ to this plan; there is nothing in heaven.

The reaction to this desperate state can be seen in the contemporary literature of Camus, or in the reaction of the drama world in what is aptly referred to as the "Theatre of the Absurd." Men are not capable of living a life free from the necessity of recognizing the existence of exterior objects. To blind oneself from these objects is a lie, and there is a something in man that will not let him live a lie. This something is what produces the tension in man. It is not God, per se, nor any other mysterious power at work to frustrate man. It is man himself, living with the truths of

⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 16.

his existence, i.e., under the unconditional moral imperative, that is at the center of his problem.

Perhaps this is what Camus, Becket, and Ionesco have come to see but have not found the courage to admit. I am speaking here of the need to admit the infinite if one is to acknowledge the finite. I am speaking here of a need to admit the spirit of union if we are to acknowledge our aloneness. And yet, I am not speaking of a need for a dualistic understanding of existence to acknowledge these needs. Further, I am not speaking of a synthesis which would exclude the identity of either entity being synthesized. The difficulty with a synthesis that excludes either identity can be seen when we try to synthesize the antimonies of finiteness with the infinite, or man with God in the hope of accomplishing a union or oneness which would be something other than what existed before the synthesis. Simply, God, the infinite, in order to transcend the gap between what we have defined as finite and infinite and thereby, by necessity of definition is explicit in the need for transcendency due to the separateness, must complete this activity remaining both God in his infiniteness and God in his finiteness. God and man cannot

be synthesized into some union other than that union which is nothing more than a separate existence in a slightly different relationship. The infinite must retain its properties in any union if it is to remain infinite and, therefore, in need of union, and the same holds true for the finite. Quickly, in Christian terms, the activity of God in Christ would be rendered pointless and unnecessary if in seeking union with God man was to desire escape from his manhood - for this is what God became, and for which he lived and died, and rose again.

No synthesis, no selflessness, no superselfness - no answer? Is there no answer to the problem of how man is to become fully a person, living in a community of persons; and existing in this fashion, being in a constant state of tension, which is the result of following the unconditional moral imperative given in grace by God, to live and pray as morally responsible individuals? We have seen that man by the very nature of the dualistic world he has manufactured for himself is constantly seeking ways to overcome the distance between the object of the dualism and himself. And we have seen that in the very attempt at overcoming this separation, he is actually driving himself further and further from the

original purpose of the attempt. As we also stated at the beginning of this chapter, so now we seem to have further supporting evidence, that no conclusion, no answer, can be drawn from these apparent contradictions.

Are we bound to make a choice then between chasing our tails or skepticism? As I have said before, I do not believe this is necessary. What is the answer then? How do we both desire and not desire at the same time? How do we become what Bonhoeffer calls the 'whole man?' "There is a wholeness about the fully grown man which makes him concentrate on the present moment....clinging too much to our desires easily prevents us from being what we ought to be and can be,"⁵⁸ and that is a person aware of the dialectic (existential) necessity of recognizing the Creator and our creatureliness, yet living in hope and not despair. Let me ask you to consider your breathing for a moment. There, now you are conscious of your breathing... now you are not! Is it necessary for you to be conscious of your breathing in order to breathe? I think those of us who are still alive would agree that this is not necessary. Now try and sustain a conscious effort of

⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 148.

breathing. This is not too difficult for most, yet one finds that this can only be done at the exclusion of other activities. It is best, one concludes, to go on breathing according to the workings of the respiratory system and not to endeavor to be conscious of each breath taken. What might we say about this in regard to desire and not-desire? Do we not desire to breathe? How foolish, certainly we do! Then to desire to breathe is good, for it sustains life. However, to be consciously desirous of breathing is not good, for it impairs a process of existence which is in no need of conscious desire to carry out its function. Also, to consciously desire to breathe keeps us from being aware of other activities of existence.

The union of life and breathing is accomplished through desiring to breathe, thereby to live, yet by not desiring to breathe as a means to go on living. Life and breathing do not exist apart from each other, they are one in existence. Only when we have a conscious desire to breathe in order that we might exist are we conscious of their being separate. In this consciousness we find a tension, and the more we desire to overcome this tension the more we find ourselves in a state of tension. When we stop desiring to breathe each breath, there

is a union again, a oneness of life and breath that we are aware of yet, in the strict sense are not consciously aware of. We participate in this state of awareness, desiring, yet not desiring, at one with the existence which is a result of the union of life and breathing.

My plea is that Christians must not fear flux or be alarmed at the relativity of all the ethos of their day...For Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and forever. And yet the Jesus we serve is Christ come and coming in the flesh. He wills to become incarnate in the contemporary of every generation; and this means that the Christ of today is not simply the Christ of yesterday. We must embrace these relativities and not fear them. For the assurance we are given is not a fixity impervious to change, but ⁵⁹ of a faithfulness promising purchase over it.

Man's dialogue with the situation he faces in history under the unconditional moral imperative frees him from the tension of living in the face of extrinsic ethical demands which can never be logically concluded. However, a new tension takes the place of the old one and 'The peace of God which passes all understanding' takes on a new meaning. Peace is to be desired, but always within the context of tension -- it can have no other existence. Peace is within the grasp

⁵⁹ J. A. T. Robinson, Christian Morals Today (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 18-19.

of the whole person when he sees his existence through the eyes of faith: faith that can abide without the idea of God as its focal point.

It is hard for faith to stand the strain of a profession whose perfection consists in its not professing itself, or rather, which confirms its reality not by assertion but by submission, not by taking over the world but by identifying itself with the world, not by resting content with just crying 'Lord, Lord,' but by living in and for the same world which has now been reconciled. But this is the necessary dialectic...existential dialectic.⁶⁰

So it is when we desire to pray and live our lives that we might become one with God. It is necessary to employ certain useful methods of prayer, certain disciplines which others before us have found useful and which we have also found useful; just as it is necessary for members of the medical profession to employ certain methods of experimentation to ascertain how one breathes, that more useful medicines can be developed to help one go on breathing. Yet, just as we participate in the fullness of existence in the union of life and breathing by not desiring, so we will find it necessary to not desire union with God in prayer if he is to ever achieve that union. Prayer as a response to the unconditional

⁶⁰ Smith, The New Man, p. 106.

cannot be a state of desire nor desirelessness. It must be a state of awareness; not passive awareness but awareness as a response of the whole person to each 'now' in that person's relationship with God and with his fellow man, i.e. on both the metaphysical and existential plane of life.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."
(Matt. 6:28)

Therein lies the answer, but we must take heed lest we look beyond this for another answer, 'outside the gate,' by entering in.

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